

*The Truth and Excellency of the
Christian Religion.*

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S E R M O N

Preached in the High Church of *Edin-
burgh*, Monday, January 3. 1732.

Upon Occasion of the Anniveriary Meet-
ing of the Society in *Scotland* for propa-
gating CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE ;

And published at their Request.

By WILLIAM HAMILTON Professor of Di-
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The Third and Fourth
Christian Religions

SERMON

Preached in the Chapel of St. John's
Hospital, London, on the 21st of
the Month of May, 1784, by
the Rev. John Wesley, Minister of the
Gospel at Finsbury Square, London.



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*The Truth and Excellency of the
Christian Religion.*

A SERMON, &c.

Phil. iii. 7. 8. *For what Things were Gain to me, these I counted Loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all Things but Loss for the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*



THE Truth and Excellency of the Christian Religion is what I propose to be discoursed of, which will afford Ground for such Exhortations as the solemn Occasion requires: The Subject is exceeding great, May God enable me to speak of it, and you to hear as becometh, and that by the gracious Assistance of his Holy Spirit.

AND first, Let us begin with a brief Consideration of our Apostle's Words and Argument, by which he sets forth the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ. *What Things were Gain to me, these I counted Loss for Christ.* Kindred, Tribe, Jewish Privileges were what in themselves might be reckoned Gain, they had their own Worth and Value, compared with the Case of those without the Jewish Church, that had been, till about that Time, the only visible Church of God upon Earth. What he adds, *Verse 8. All Things,* is more exten-

five, and may take in Riches, Honours and other worldly Advantages which are Gain, and good Blessings of Providence in themselves, and which we are not absolutely bound to reject or throw away; but they are to be counted *Loss for Christ*, that is bad, in respect of the Circumstances that may and oft en doth accompany them, and did attend them in our Apostle's Case before his Conversion; that is the Confidence with which they fill Men, as if these were substantial and sufficient Goods, and imported our being in a justified State: And so in respect of this bad Quality, which from our Ignorance and Corruption we annex to them, instead of being Gain they become Loss, by hindering us from seeing the supereminent Excellency of Christ, and by making us take up our Rest in them, without going to him, in whom only is Justification, Ease and Peace, solid Satisfaction, the Life of the Soul, compleat and everlasting Happiness. So whatever Things they are, Blessings of common Providence, or special Privileges, however good and gainful in their Nature and Kind, when abused to the filling us with false Confidence, and so detaining us from Christ, and the Happiness that is to be found in him, and in him alone, of Gain they become Loss, of profitable Things they become unprofitable and hurtful; for such is the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ, that whatever dims our Eyes, or turns them away from beholding it, does us the greatest Hurt to our Souls, however good these Things be supposed in themselves; for what Loss so great as that of so excellent a Thing, *the Knowledge of Christ, and to be found in him, having his Righteousness?* So the Apostle's Argument lands in this, It proves the Excellency of the Knowledge

ledge of Christ from this, that all other Things, however excellent and useful, when put in the Balance with it, and standing in Competition against it, are Nothing, and *Loss*, in so much as, filling the Mind with vain Confidence, they blind the Eyes of the Understanding, that they do not discern it, and hinder the true Happiness we might have by improving it.

What he saith, *yea doubtless*, may be understood of his steadfast Perseverance in the Esteem of Christ and his Doctrine: That which he had said before, was not a sudden Flash of Affection, excited by hearing new Things, but which goes off again when the Spirits, raised by Novelty, are calmed; upon the contrary, in the most sedate and composed Frame of Mind, upon Trial and Experience, he was the more confirmed in a well-grounded Persuasion of *the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ*, as what would abide the Test, even the strictest Test, and be found as the purest Gold, that loses nothing by being tried in the Fire, which consumes Dross.

As to the Phrase, *Excellency of Knowledge*, the Construction is much used in the original Language of the New Testament, and literally followed in our Version, and signifies the same, as if it were said in our common Way of Construction, *The most excellent Knowledge*; the Form of Expression in the *Greek*, having the Force of a strong Superlative.

What he adds, *My Lord*, expresses his great Affection and Love to Christ, and his Doctrine and Cause; a Thing most necessary to go along with the Knowledge of him, and the Belief of his Doctrine. And it may justly appear a Wonder, that any who knows with any tolerable Measure
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of Light in the Understanding, and truly believes the Revelation of Christ, should not be thus affected, considering the Frame of our Nature, and the Inclination implanted in it, to love, esteem and desire what appears excellent, and that with Degrees of Affection, raised in Proportion to the Degree of Excellency in the Object that presents itself: But alas! Experience shows the contrary, in the Case of most Men to whom Christ is preached, and who profess to believe the Gospel; and this seems no otherwise to be accounted for, but from the woful Depravation of our Nature in our present State.

BUT, to return to our Apostle, we see him setting forth the *Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ*; and he does it indeed by way of Comparison: But to follow out the Subject in this Method would, I fear, occasion my being too tedious; and therefore I propose to handle it as a plain Proposition only, which may be expressed thus, *The Knowledge of Christ is the most excellent Knowledge*; and by the Knowledge of Christ I understand the whole of the Gospel-Revelation concerning him; as our Divine Saviour sent of God to redeem us by his Death, and to show us by his Doctrine the Way of Salvation, and to renew us by his Holy Spirit, purifying our Souls unto the obeying of the Truth.

LET this then be the Doctrine, *The Knowledge of Christ is the most excellent Knowledge*. And the Heads of Prosecution may be, in regard its Excellency presupposes its Truth, *First*, To say something of the Truth of the Christian Religion, and particularly how its Excellency proves its Truth, *2dly*, To enlarge a little more upon some particular Heads,
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wherein its Excellency appears. *3dly*, To draw suitable Inferences with respect to the Subject and Occasion of this Sermon.

First, I say, Its Excellency supposes its Truth: For were it to be supposed not true, this would absolutely destroy the Character of its Excellency, as what could not possibly belong to it: We shall therefore offer something with Relation to the Truth of the Gospel, and the rather because of the Infidelity that appears in our Day, to the great Scandal of the Age. When I enter upon this Subject, I am sensible it may appear more proper for a Treatise than a Sermon; and there have been many excellent Treatises written upon it. God who brings Good out of Evil, making the malicious Efforts of the Adversaries of Truth, an Occasion of setting it forth in a clearer Light, by animating its Votaries with Zeal for the Christian Cause, and enabling them to maintain it strenuously, to the putting Infidelity to the Blush, if it were capable of it. It is not practicable in a Discourse of this Nature, to descend into the particular Quibbles, by which the Writers for Infidelity attack this and the other Passages of holy Writ; for that the elaborate Performances of the many excellent Authors of the Age, who have written against Infidelity, are to be consulted: But I must confine my self to one Argument or two, as general Proofs of the Truth of our holy Religion.

AND *First*, If the principal Facts, upon which the Truths of the whole complex Doctrine depends, be true, then must the whole be true: For these Facts are to ascertain the Divine Mission of our blessed Saviour, that he was sent of God to shew
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his Will to Men, and that he is to be believed in all the Things that he taught.

These principal Facts, to mention only a few of them, but such as shall be sufficient for the Argument, are, that in one of the most noted *Eras* of Time, in the Reigns of *Augustus*, and *Tiberius* Roman Emperors, appeared in *Judea* a Person who preached and wrought innumerable Miracles, in the View of Multitudes, Friends and Enemies; that he was cruelly put to the infamous Death of the Cross by the *Jews*, that he rose again from the dead the Third Day; that according as he had promised, he endowed his *Disciples with Power from on High*, and sent them forth to Witness his Resurrection, and confirm their Testimony by the miraculous Powers he had given them. In all this, it was impossible they could be deceived themselves, by fancying they had these Powers, if they had them not; nor could they deceive others who were Witnesses of the Exercise of them, such as speaking with Tongues they had never learned, healing all Manner of Diseases, and even raising the dead, and communicating these Powers to others by laying their Hands on them. I say, these Facts so attested, had they not been true, it appeareth absolutely impossible in the Nature of Things that they could ever have gained Credit among Men; but on the contrary, must have exposed the Asserters of them to the utmost Redicule, and made them the Scorn of Mankind. Let it but be supposed, that such a mad Fancy should enter into the Heads of any Set of Men now a Days, to advance a new Scheme of Doctrine, and put it upon that Issue, that it descended upon Facts said to be done in *Britain* or any Part of the known World, by a Person in the
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Age of these now living, who cured these who were Blind and Lame from their Birth, raised the Dead, and the like; and also himself rose from the Dead, after he had been publickly and unquestionably put to Death in the View of Multitudes: I say, to advance any Scheme of Doctrine, founded upon such Facts notoriously false, what must it produce, but the highest Contempt of the Asserters of them? Nor is it possible they could ever make Profelytes among Men not distracted in their Wits; yet this would be the Case, as to the Cause of Christianity, upon Supposition that the principal Facts it depends upon were not true.

And yet we see Christianity not only gained Belief in these Circumstances, which Belief proves that the Facts must have been notoriously true; nor among a few only of these of the meaner Sort: But with a prodigious Swiftnes and Rapidity it flew over all the Parts of the known World, and was embraced by Men of all Degrees; and that it was so is no Wonder, excepting in this that the Wonders of God were every where visible to gain Credit to the Testimony of the Apostles and first Preachers of Christ. Nor is the Number of Converts the only Thing considerable in this Argument, the Obstacles to be overcome adds greatly to the Force of it, the Prejudices of the *Jews*; the Power of the *Romans*, the greatest of its kind that ever was in the World; the Respect to the established Religion deeply rooted in the Minds of Men; the Wit, Learning and Sophistry of the *Heathen* Philosophers, then flourishing in great Numbers; and, which is most of all, the prevailing Lusts and strong Passions of Men, all opposed this Belief, but in vain: For Idolaters and Profli-

gates, the vicious and luxurious, became temperate, virtuous, holy and Worshippers of the true God; and, even under the most cruel Persecutions of *Jews* and *Heathens*, whereby they endeavoured to stifle Christianity in its Birth, they became Saints and Martyrs, for the Evidence of their Faith was irresistible, and all Things must give Way to it. Besides, this wonderful Success of the Gospel, was not by a sudden Flash, that will appear perhaps sometimes in one Age and vanish again, but it took Root in so stable a Way, as to remain to this present Age, after Seventeen hundred Years are elapsed: The World is to this Day filled with Christians, this is what we perceive with our Senses, and what reflects an invincible Evidence upon what we have but heard of those Facts which are the Foundations of Christianity; for if these had not been true, it could never have been established; or suppose it had got footing for a little Time, by a Concurrence of unusual Circumstances which mislead Men, it must have quickly fallen down; Time, the Mother of Truth, would have discovered the Falshood, had it been built upon a false Foundation. And as what we now see with our Eyes reflects back Light upon Events past, so it looks forward to the great Events to come, the General Judgment, the Resurrection of the Body, the Happiness of the Blessed in Heaven, and the Torments of the Wicked in Hell: For what we see accomplished now, according to Predictions relating to the Calling of the *Gentiles*, confirms the remaining Predictions that make Part of the same System of Doctrine, all which stand bottomed upon the same principal Facts of Christianity, which if they be true, all must be true that pertains to the System.

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But I perceive I must not launch out upon this Head; many are the different Topicks that might be used, and are used by the Advocates for the Truth of Christianity, but I must remember not to trespass too much upon your Patience: And therefore shall add but one other Argument for the Truth of the Christian Revelation, and it is in a Word just this of the Text, *the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ*, the Excellency of the Christian Revelation proves the Truth of it. It may perhaps be thought this comes out of Order, and that I should first have shewn its Excellence at large, and then have formed my Argument; but I am here only to argue from a general View of its Excellence, or rather from the Supposition of it, leaving the more ample Illustration of it to the next Head, and being willing to dispatch what relates to this first Head, before I enter upon the other.

Now, the Argument in short is, If it be an excellent Revelation, as it is, then it must needs be true; if it continually speaks honourably and worthily of God, as it doth; if it continually beats down Vice as it doth; if through the whole it breathes Goodness, the Love of God and Men, Virtue, Justice and Charity, who but a good Being can be the Author of it? And what good Being but the Supreme Being, the Author of every good Gift? For would any other good Being personate him, and say *thus saith the Lord*, as is done in this Revelation throughout? And to suppose that he has employed subordinate good Beings, commissioned and inspired by him as Ministers to communicate this Revelation to Mankind, which Supposition we admit, the Argument will stand just the same as before; still it must be of God, and if of God it must be true, *for it is impossible for God to lie.*

But let us consider a little a Supposition of the Infidels, that it comes from an evil Being; let us see what this Supposition comes to, and if it be possible to make Sense of it. To say that the great Enemy of Man's Salvation, *who goes about like a roaring Lion seeking whom he may devour*, can possibly be the Author of it, is no less than to suppose, that instead of seeking Man's Ruin he should act the directly opposite Part, that is, to put him in the Way of his Happiness, to shew wherein it consists, and press him to it by the most powerful Motives, and so, as our Saviour argues, be divided against himself, and destroy his own Kingdom: For nothing can be more evident than that the principal Design of the Gospel-Revelation is, by making Men good and holy, to bring them to God, and the highest Happiness their Nature is capable of in the Enjoyment of him in a State of eternal Bliss.

And to suppose that some Man, or if you please a Society of Men, whether acted by Caprice or Malice, Love of Fame, or whatever it could be that moved them to it, what possibly could be the Plot, or how should it be practicable to execute it? For as to the Books of the Old Testament, were they a Forgery, what could be the Drift, but either to describe some Hero by giving him the most unblemished and fair Character; or to praise and exalt a Nation, namely the *Jewish*, whose History these Books contain? But neither of these could be the Compilers View, for as to all the Worthies of the Old Testament, there is not one whose Failings are not left upon Record; and as for the *Jewish* Nation, so black is their Character through the whole of the History, that one might be temp-
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ned to think it had been composed by some bitter Enemy of theirs, were it not that their Fondness of these Books, even to Superstition and Excess, sufficiently refutes that Thought.

And suppose it had been designed to put a Cheat upon the World, by false and forged History of Time, Events and Nations, for more than three thousand Years; how was it practicable for any to do it, either with or without concert? Could the concert of a Cheat be possibly carried on through so many Ages, and by different Hands? No certainly, as little was it practicable for any to do it by himself without concert: For Experience shows us that Forgery, even of the smallest Scrap of History, cannot escape Discovery, such is the Penetration of Men, and so various the Means to find it out; and the more bulky and large the forged Piece happens to be, it is still the more impracticable for the Author or Authors of it to screen themselves from the Discovery.

And to come to the New-Testament, beside the Stile and simple Way of relating plain Facts, that has so visible an Air of Truth and Sincerity stamped upon it, could it ever enter into the Heart of any mortal, of never so subtile a Wit, to found his Scheme upon the Doctrine of a crucified Saviour, *which was to the Jews a stumbling Block; and to the Greeks Foolishness, but the Wisdom of God and the Power of God to them that believe.*

I have insisted the longer upon this Objection, as being the main One however absurd, and what all particular Objections must terminate in, or they prove nothing but must vanish into Smoke: And this the Infidel must be driven to or else yield the Cause, and acknowledge the Truth of Revelation;

tion; for there is no possible Medium; if it be not acknowledged to be true, then must it be a Forgery, but to believe this notwithstanding such palpable Impossibility and Impracticability, must needs infer an Infidel to be contradictory to himself, in as much as it shews a strong Degree of false Belief, while in the mean Time he is unwilling to believe at all.

But it is Time that I should come to the *second* Head, which is to illustrate the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ; and what I am to offer upon it shall be the following Particulars, into which the Gospel-Revelation may be branched.

1. Its Discoveries of God and his Perfections,
2. The Perfection of the Rules of Practice it proposes.
3. The powerful Motives by which they are enforced.
4. The sure Grounds it lays down for the Ease and Peace of Men's Minds, and their future Hopes.

It is true, as to some of these, it falls in with the Light of Nature; but at the same Time improves and refines it, and carries Things to a far greater Height of Perfection than the Light of Nature ever attained to, as it is now darkned by the Fall.

First, THE Excellency of the Gospel-Doctrine appears in this, that it represents unto us the ever blessed God in the most glorious and amiable Light as to his Nature and Perfections. That he is the one God, who is the *I am*, the necessary and self-existent Being, *from Everlasting to Everlasting* God, the Author of all other Beings, and the Fountain of all Goodness, who hath given to all Things the Being, Breath and Life which they have, and

upholdeth them all by the Word of his Power, whose Kingdom ruleth over all, whose Power, Wisdom, Goodness and other Perfections shine forth in all his Works, as *Psa. xix. 1.* Who is commended unto us in these Revelations of his Word, as a Being in the Knowledge of whom is Life and Happiness, *Job. xvii. 3.* the Happiness of the Man consisting in the enobling of his understanding, the highest Perfection of his Nature with the Knowledge of the most excellent Object, to wit, God and his infinitely glorious Perfections, which are an inexhaustible Source to satiate happy Souls, with the Contemplation of them to all Eternity : And he is likewise commended unto us in a particular Manner by that overflowing Goodness, which if it be considered with due Attention must needs draw the Soul to him in Love and Gratitude ; *the Earth is full of his Riches* how great is his Goodness unto all, *it is his Sun that shines, his Rain that falls upon the unthankful and the Evil.* These Things, 'tis true, the book of Nature sheweth, but still they are in a more lively Manner described in the Book of the Scriptures, which add particular Discoveries of his Goodness, and other Perfections, of which there will be Occasion to speak by and by.

I therefore go on to the *Second Head*, by which the Excellence of the Gospel-Revelation appears, the Perfection of its moral Rules. And this is a Thing so evident, that even Infidels themselves are forced to acknowledge, to the Honour of our blessed Redeemer, that the most consummate Wisdom of any Philosopher, no, even all of them put together, did never produce such a perfect System of Morality as that of the Gospel : But it needs not
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their Testimony, it speaks for it self; let but any one take an impartial View of it, can the Point of moral Perfection be possibly carried higher, than to *love God with all our Heart, with all our Soul, with all our Strength, with all our Mind, and our Neighbour as our selves?*

Morality may be considered with Respect to the Honour of God, the Good of others, and the perfecting of One's own Nature; now in all these Respects Christian Morality, as taught by our Saviour, is carried to the highest Point of Perfection.

As to the Honour of God, the Gospel-Revelation teaches us to have no Will opposite to his blessed Will to be absolutely resigned to him, *to live not unto our selves but unto him, and whether we eat or we drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to his Glory*; not to serve him with outward Appearance, *but to worship him in Spirit and in Truth, and to glorify him in our Bodies and our Spirits which are his.*

As to the Good of others, how much is it consulted by the Gospel-Rules of Practice, not only directing and enjoining the rooting out of all the evil Passions, from which injurious Actions proceed, as Envy, Hatred, Malice, Revenge and the like: But tying us in the strongest Manner to all Sort of Acts of Benevolence; Love and Goodness toward our fellow Creatures; making Charity so essential to Religion and Christianity, that without it all other Things are nothing, as *1 Cor. xiii. 1. &c.* We are not to stop at Justice, for in that the very Heathens can vye with us; nay nor Acts of Kindness, if we confine them to our Friends, for without we be good like our heavenly Father, *who is kind to the unthankful and the evil*, our Saviour puts that serious Question to us, *Matth. v. 47. what*

what do ye more than others? Now can any System of Laws be possibly conceived more excellent and perfect with respect to our Fellow-creatures and more conducive to their Happiness, were they observed; by these, the innumerable Griefs, Miseries and Troubles caused to Men by one another, would be banished out of the World; and by observing them, every one would contribute to make others more happy and joyful in Life; and we should have, as it were, a Heaven upon Earth: And that it is not so, is not to be imputed to any Defect in our Religion, but to Men's Corruption, who though they profess it will not practise it.

And then, as to the perfecting of Ones own Nature, so far as it doth not depend upon the Behaviour of others toward him, but that he may have a Happiness within himself, be their Carriage what it will: The Corruption and Misery of a Man is the Prevalence of those evil Passions in him, corrupt Self-love, Pride, Worldly-mindedness, Hatred and Revenge, which debase his Soul, disturb his Quiet, and ty him to vain Enjoyments in which he can never find his Happiness; but which on the contrary, are as so many Serpents or devouring Wolves tearing his own Bowels: But the Gospel directing and enjoyning to root them out, puts every one in the true Road of the Happiness and Perfection of his Nature, and leads him to inward Peace and Purity, and the raising of his Faculties to a Resemblance of his Divine Maker, the Model of all Perfection; how excellent in all Respects is this System of Morality which our Saviour has taught us!

BUT again *3dly*, Let us consider the Excellency of the Motives of the Gospel by which they are enforced. The blessed Gospel, leaving in their full Force, nay improving all the cogent Arguments of the Religion of Nature; whereby it commends Virtue and exposes the Deformity and Mischief of Vice; adds of its own, as what is peculiar to its self, Motives vastly higher and stronger than any of these of natural Religion. The Consideration of a future State of Rewards and Punishments may be reckoned to natural Religion: But then, how much are even these heightened by the Gospel, which sets forth in the strongest Light, the Certainty of a future Life of eternal Duration, with the Addition of that important Article of the Resurrection of the Body, the inconceivable Greatness of the heavenly Glory, and the dreadful Terrors of the Eternity and Intensity of Hell-Torments, together with the awful Judgment of the great Day; these are the Improvements the Gospel-Revelation makes of the Motives of natural Religion. But then, as peculiar to it self, there is that most astonishing Dispensation of Divine Love and Grace, in giving no meaner Person to save us than the Son of God, and no less a Price of our Redemption than his Death upon a Cross; what adorable Mysteries does this contain? Of the ever blessed Trinity employed for accomplishing our Salvation, the Father giving his Son, the Son willingly undertaking the great Work, and the Holy Spirit making it effectual, the Incarnation and Satisfaction made to Divine Justice by God in our Nature. Here is to be considered, *First*, The Greatness of the Motive. *2dly*, How it is calculated to gain the Heart to God.

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First, The Greatness of the Motive. Others are exceeding great, the never-failing Goodness of God, the Abundance of his Blessings daily dispensed to Mankind in his Works of Creation and Providence, the native Beauty and Excellency of moral Virtue, and the Deformity and pernicious Nature and Effects of Vice : But how vastly does this Motive of the Love of God, in giving his Son to save us, exceed them all ? How amazing is it ! that *God so loved the World, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal Life ; God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, and how will he not with him give us all Things ?* This, the greatest of all Gifts, becomes a Pledge of all other good Things which are but lesser Gifts ; and that he should not only give him to redeem us by his Power, but by his Death, even *the accursed Death of the Cross*, how surpassing great is this Love, *not that we loved him but he loved us, and gave his Son to be the Propitiation for our Sins ?*

2dly, How much is this Motive calculated to gain the Heart. Other Motives work upon Men's Fears and Hopes, and may make them do Things from external Considerations, which otherwise their Inclinations would not lead them to ; humane Laws may curb Mens Vices without working any real Sanctification in their Souls, without which the Man is not gained to true Goodness : But this wonderful Love of God in Christ, how strongly doth it enforce our Love to God, that powerful Principle of Goodness, which seasons all the Faculties of the Soul with a holy Tincture, and pervades and influences the Whole of the Man and all his Actions, supplying him with that essential

Thing in Religion, a prevailing Love to God, without which all other Ingredients of it are but empty Shew.

BUT *Lastly*, let us come to the Consideration of the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ, in respect of the sure Grounds it lays down for the Ease and Peace of Mens Minds and their future Hopes. Many are the Griefs, Fears and Cares of poor sinful Mortals : By reducing them to a few general Heads, we may the better perceive, how full the Gospel Consolations are. There is the Guilt of Sin, the Corruption of our Nature, Afflictions, Death and what comes after Death ; do but satisfy a weary Soul as to all these, and what remains further necessary to make him easy, content and happy as to the State of his Mind ?

Now *first* with respect to the Guilt of Sin. Unless it be pardoned he is undone ; for it bars Heaven's Gates against him, and will God upon his Repentance pardon him or not ? Here all that the Light of Nature can say leaves him in Doubt and Perplexity : But how great is the Comfort that the Blessed Gospel yields ? *God was in Christ reconciling the World to himself, not imputing their Trespases unto them ; let the wicked forsake his Way and the unrighteous Man his Thoughts, and turn to God, and he will have Mercy on him, to our God and he will abundantly pardon : As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the Death of a Sinner, but that he should turn and live : Cease to do Evil, learn to do well ; and though your Iniquities were as Crimson they shall be white as Snow, though they were as Scarlet they shall be as Wool.* And as if these plain Promises so strongly confirmed, even by the
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the Oath of God, had not been enough to quiet our Minds in this great Dread of the Wrath of God for our Guilt, the greatest of all Terrors: For the more effectual assuring us, he hath been pleased to open up the Grounds of this his great Mercy, the expiatory Sacrifice of his Son's Blood. If it be a wonderful Thing that the incensed Majesty of Heaven should design to pardon guilty Rebels; ungrateful and worthless Wretches, that multiply their Rebellions aggravated by innumerable provoking Circumstances: It is yet more wonderful in respect of the Cause, *he made him to be Sin for us who knew no Sin, that we might be made the Righteousness of God in him: And the Blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all Sin.* And to strengthen our Faith of pardoning Mercy, he hath instituted an Ordinance wherein, by sensible Signs, is sealed to us our Partaking in the Body and Blood of Christ for this blessed Effect, among others, the Pardon of our Sins.

2dly, As to the Corruption of our Nature, the prevailing of our Lusts and evil Affections, should these remain in us, we are unavoidably miserable. For this Corruption of our Nature, and Debilement of our Souls, this Alienation from the holy Law of God the Rule of Perfection, is very Misery it self, which truly pious Persons are so sensible of, as to have it for the chief Cause of their Sorrow and Mourning while they are in this State of Imperfection; Witness the holy Apostle Paul's Exclamation, *O wretched Man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the Body of this Death?* In which the truly godly are ready to join with him: But what a blessed Remedy doth the Gospel of Christ afford us? His holy Precepts to convert our Souls,

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and his blessed Spirit to imprint them upon our Hearts for that End, to stamp upon us the Image of God anew; and carry on our Sanctification by Degrees, till it be at length compleated in the After-state of Blessedness: Of which Influence of the Spirit we have the most explicit Promises, *ask and ye shall receive; and if ye being evil know how to give good Gifts, much more will your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him; and if any Man lack Wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all Men liberally and ubraideth not*: And these Promises are sealed to us in our Baptism, which is a Symbol of our Regeneration.

3dly, As to Afflictions and Miseries under which we groan while in this Tabernacle. We are assured *That whom God loves he rebukes and chastens; that all Things work together for good to them that love God; that our light Afflictions, which are but for a Moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory; and that a Hair of our Head cannot fall to the Ground without our heavenly Father; and that though Affliction for the present seemeth not to be joyous but grievous, yet nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable Fruit of Righteousness, to them that are exercised thereby; and that no Afflictions or Distresses can separate us from the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus, but that in all these Things we are more than Conquerors through him that loved us*.

4thly, As to Death the King of Terrors, which through fear of it keeps Men all their Life-time subject to Bondage. The Sting of it is taken away, and that triumphant Song put in the Mouths of those that die in the Lord, *O Death, where is thy Sting? O Grave, where is thy Victory? Of an*
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Enemy it becomes a Friend, translating us from this Valley of Misery to the heavenly Bliss, *where Mortality is swallowed up of Life.*

And so *lastly*, As to what shall become of us hereafter, we have our blessed Redeemer's Assurance that he is gone to prepare for us *Mansions of Glory in his Father's House, where there are many, that where he is there we may be also.* We are assured that our separated Spirits shall be with him in the Interval between Death and the Resurrection; and that our Bodies shall be restored immortal and incorruptible, *Spiritual Bodies, fashioned like unto his glorious Body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all Things unto himself.* And thus, both in Soul and Body we are secured in an immutable State of Felicity, *fulnes of Joy in his Presence, and at his right Hand Pleasures for evermore.*

And thus upon the whole, how excellent, how surpassingly excellent, is this Knowledge of Christ, that gives us the most glorious and comfortable Discoveries of God, who consults by his Laws and Precepts the Perfection of our Nature, the good of Humane Society, and the Happiness of every one in particular; enforces these Laws by the strongest Motives, and provides for the Ease and Peace of our Minds, against all the Grievs and Fears that can possibly disturb them.

AND thus I have gone through what I proposed to be spoken to as to the Truth and Excellency of the Christian Revelation: What remaineth is the Application of this Doctrine, which shall be in some Exhortations which it leads to, suitable to the Occasion of this Sermon.

And

And *First*, With most thankful Hearts let us bless God who hath given this excellent Revelation unto us, when he hath not dealt so with every Nation : Let us adore the Depth of that kind and merciful Providence, that brought our Forefathers out of heathenish Darkness, and that not by Means of their devising, but by sovereign and preventing Mercy, thereby fulfilling his Word, *I was found of them that sought me not* : Let us then bless him with the highest Notes of Praise, for this invaluable Mercy, that we not only enjoy this Revelation; but enjoy it in its Purity, purged from the gross Errors, Corruptions and Superstitions of *Rome*, in which a great Part of the Christian World is involved to this Day ; purged, I say, by a glorious and pure Reformation in Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government, according to his Word. The glorious Events by which this inestimable Blessing has been procured to us, are ever to be remembered with the highest Sense of Gratitude. The first planting of the Gospel in our Land, a little after the Age of the Apostles, laid the Foundation for what followed : And notwithstanding that, by a Weakness of Mens Minds, Things affect us less as they are further removed from us, yet the Distance of Time in which this happy Event was accomplished, is so far from detracting from the Greatness of the Mercy, that it exceedingly enhances the Value of it : To this is owing that we are not born in a *Mahometan* or a Pagan Country, and brought up in Prejudices which probably we should never cast off, and when other Nations greater and more powerful than we, were left and still continue under the Delusions

tions of Popery, which had spread so wide and
 so greatly deviated from primitive Christianity,
 the blessed Reformation next was brought about
 among us by the good Hand of God, and is still
 preserved and secured unto us by other most re-
 markable Interpositions of Providence, the two
 most memorable Events, of the Revolution by
 our Glorious Deliverer King *William*, and the
 happy Succession of the present Royal Family,
 are especially worthy our greatest Regard; by
 the former an impending Storm was dissipated,
 of Popery and Slavery, of Superstition and Ty-
 ranical Persecution upon the account of Reli-
 gion, which is truly an Antichristian Spirit where-
 ever it prevails; and by the latter we are filled
 with the joyful Hopes, that there is an effectual
 Bar to the introducing them among us again,
 and with the glad Prospect of a lasting Security
 of all our precious Liberties sacred and civil
 to us and our Posterity after us, under the au-
 spicious Government of his present Majesty
 King *George*, and the Successors of his Royal
 Line, which we earnestly pray may never be
 wanting.

2dly, Let us receive this excellent Revelation
 with a firm and unshaken Faith. And since it hath
 pleased God to deliver it unto us clothed with
 clear and convincing Evidence of its Truth, let us
 not rest in an implicit Faith, that receives it only
 as the Religion of our Ancestors, and of the Coun-
 try where we live: For thus we should be Christi-
 ans only by Accident, and upon such Grounds as
 would have made us *Pagans*, *Mahometans*, or
Jews, had it been our Lot to be born and edu-
 cated among them; Faith upon no other Founda-

dation can never be a true Christian and saving Faith. Let us therefore attend to the Evidence of the Truth of our Religion that presents it self to us, and lay a good Foundation of Christian Knowledge whereupon to build a firm Belief of it, that may be Proof against the impious Cavils of the Infidels of the Age; and that *we may be able to render to every one that asketh us a Reason of the Hope that is in us, with Meekness and Fear.*

3dly, Let us be careful to have our Hearts suitably affected with this excellent Knowledge. It is the Knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord; let every one of us turn seriously to himself, as our Apostle doth in the Text; and consider, that this is the Knowledge of him who had the Love to die for me, upon whom depends all my Hopes of Mercy and Salvation, *who loved me and gave himself for me, and hath called me to his eternal Glory; who has promised to be with me in going through the dark Valley of the shadow of Death, to give me everlasting Life, and raise me up at the last Day.* Let us dwell upon this Thought, *Jesus Christ my Lord*, till it warm our Heart with Love to him. And also let us consider, in a serious and affecting Manner, the Nature and Qualities of this Doctrine, the Usefulness of it for the Good of social and private Life, and the Comfort it contains; that we may receive it not only with Faith, but with *the Love of the Truth*: When a Man hears good News he wishes they were true; were there ever such glad Tidings as these? Was there ever such a joyful Sound, *Glory to God in the highest, on Earth Peace, good Will towards Men?*

4thly, Let us be sure to improve it to Practice, every one as to his own personal Concern, or we

not

not only Lose the Fruit and Benefit of it, but it will heighten our Condemnation that we ever knew it; *The Servant that knows his Master's Will and doth it not shall be beaten with many Stripes*: It is a practical Doctrine, and if not improved for Sanctification in Heart and Life, it is lost to us, and we shall be doubly lost and condemned that knew it and would not do it; *if ye know these Things happy are ye if ye do them; and he is the wise Man that buildeth his House upon a Rock, who beareth and doth the Words of Christ, but he is a foolish Man that buildeth his House upon the Sand, who beareth and doth them not.*

ably, Let all do their best toward the Propagation of this excellent Knowledge in the World: Common Humanity calls every one to contribute according to his Power for the diffusing so great a Benefit to Mankind: If Charity and Beneficence are Duties, the greater the Benefit be that we confer, the greater is the Charity. To feed the hungry, cloath the naked, and the like, are laudable Acts of Beneficence; but they regard the Body only and this present perishing Life: To feed Souls with the excellent Knowledge of Christ, is a higher Benefit that respects Eternity. And as this is so great an Act of Humanity and Christian Charity, so it is what a Regard to the Honour of God obliges us to in the strongest manner; how great a Tribute of Glory redounds to him upon Account that his infinite Mercy is made known to Men for their Salvation through his Son? Can we think how this our blessed Redeemer spared not his own Blood, but suffered himself to be nailed to a Cross, there to die for the Life of the World? And shall we be slack as to any Thing in our Power, whereby we may

contribute to his Glory, by promoting the Knowledge of him ; especially when we consider the great Occasions that present themselves, the loud Calls of the Necessities of Poor miserable Sinners *perishing for lack of Knowledge*, Multitudes, Multitudes, even among Christians, are so stated as to want due Instruction for want of Hands to be employed among them; and Want of necessary Support to those who would be willing to bestow their Labour in instructing them. And then how vast Countries are there where the Gospel has not yet got Footing, and where the poor Heathen have no Means of Instruction but the dim Light of Nature, who have never heard the Gospel, *and how shall they believe unless they hear ? and how shall they hear without a Preacher ?* And their Case calls the louder for a Remedy, in as much as we find, from those who have travelled among them, that these poor Souls, destitute of the Means of Knowledge, are not filled with those Prejudices against the Gospel, which makes *Jews* and *Mahometans* persist in their Infidelity : In them it is meer Ignorance, in the others Obstinacy, which is harder to be overcome.

○ B U T perhaps it may be said, what can we do as to those Things ? Are we to run through the World to proselyte Infidels and Heathens ? No indeed, this would breed Disorder and Confusion, and interfere with other necessary Duties : But there are nevertheless Duties relating to the Propagation of the Gospel incumbent upon all.

As *First*, To take heed that by their bad Lives, their Profaneness and Immorality, their Injustice and Dishonesty, their Strife and Variance, especially their angry Contentions about Matters
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of Controversy, and their Uncharitableness toward one another, they do not obstruct the Conversion of Infidels, by exciting Prejudices in them against Christianity, who are ready to impute the Faults of its Professors to the Religion it self: Alas! how much Evil has been done this Way, scarce any one can be ignorant who knows the State of the World.

2dly, All may, at least if they can do no more, pour out earnest Prayers to God for the fulfilling of the Predictions of his Word, as to the Calling of the *Gentiles* and Conversion of the *Jews*; that he would provide Means in his wise and powerful Providence, for obtaining of these great Ends, that he would infuse into many a charitable Disposition to contribute to them; and direct such as he has given that Spirit unto, to the best Ways of prosecuting them, this is a Duty none can pretend is not in their Power.

But 3dly, According to People's Circumstances, and the Circumstances of Providence, with Respect to that Affair of propagating the Knowledge of Christ, it becomes a Duty even to contribute to it by their worldly Substance: Those who are able and will not do any Thing this Way give no great Evidence of the Sincerity of their Prayers, for the Enlargement of the Gospel-Kingdom, which, 'tis to be supposed, makes one Article in a Christian's daily Addresses to God. It pleased God, after the first sudden Propagation of the Gospel by miraculous Gifts and Powers, to leave it to the ordinary Way of humane Instruction, by Men who have the promised Assistance of his Spirit, of whom a certain Order, the Preachers of the Gospel, have it more immediately for their Work

Work and Business, to instruct People in the Knowledge of Christ: And other Christians are certainly bound to furnish Means for supporting the Ministers of the Gospel, and are also obliged to contribute the necessary Expences for carrying on the Work; a great Branch of which, is the erecting and maintaining of Charity-Schools, for the Benefit of the poorer Sort, who are not able to provide themselves with the Means of Instruction.

THIS leads me to exhort all whom the Lord hath blest with Substance, to honour him with it, by bestowing a little of it for this noble and excellent End of propagating the *Knowledge of Christ*, and there are many particular Motives to excite you of this Place and Nation to this Duty; it is now generally known, that we have among us an Honourable *Society for propagating Christian Knowledge*, with Respect to which, suffer me to mention a few Things that tend to enforce the Exhortation, and then I shall conclude.

1. More than twenty Years ago, it pleased God to put it into the Hearts of some pious Persons, Ministers of the Gospel and others, to form this Design; many of them are now with the Lord: The wonderful Success of the Undertaking, we are to look upon as a Call of Providence to contribute to its Advancement, since we have so fair an Opportunity presented unto us.

2^{dly}, The Management of the Society's Affairs, though necessarily requiring much Time, Attendance and Labour, yet is carried on with such Prudence, Faithfulness and diligent Application, as hath raised the Reputation of the Society not only

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among our selves, but in distant Parts, as you shall hear more particularly.

3dly, The Trust is chiefly in the Hands of those you know, your Neighbours and Friends, of the best Character for Virtue and Probity; and among them the Honourable Judges of the Land, and others in publick Offices, and of high Rank and Quality.

4thly, The Society have extended their Views and Care even to Foreign Parts, they have established Correspondence Abroad, and provided for Missionaries to be employed among the Heathen in the *West Indies*, where there is a great Harvest and the Labourers are few: And this they have done, after having erected great Numbers of Schools in our own Highlands and Islands, by which many thousands have been taught the Knowledge of Christ.

5thly, This hopeful Progress of the Society's laudable Enterprise, has drawn the Eyes of our Neighbours of *Ireland* upon them, who, to the Honour of ours, have formed a Society much of the same Nature; copying after our Example: May we stir up one another, by a mutual and pious Emulation; we shall not envy their Prosperity; but heartily wish and pray for it. A good many also of our Neighbours of *England* have given liberal Donations to us, especially since the erecting of a correspondent Meeting at *London*, which has done, and is still doing great Service to the Design.

And when all these, and other Things that for Brevity's sake I omit, are considered, what Pity would it be, that such a pious and christian Work should be suffered to languish through our
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own Coldness and Indifference, God forbid it should. But blest be his Name for the Society's Affairs are in such a Situation, as gives us great Hopes it will sublift and prosper: But though their Stock be considerable, yet what is it in respect of the Demands of needy Objects whose Case calls aloud for Help? Let me then, dear Christians, lay it home to your Hearts and Consciences, as you value the most *excellent Knowledge of Christ*, as ye love and honour your blessed Redeemer, and as ye would wish the Good of precious Souls, spare a little of your superfluous Substance, to advance so noble an End: You will perhaps say, you have nothing superfluous; but might not something be well spared from the Luxury of Furniture, Tables and Dress, for so worthy a Purpose as this; and from those publick Diversions that are so expensive, would to God they were harmless in other Respects. But that I may detain you no longer, consider what the Cause is we are pleading for, the Propagation of the most *excellent Knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord*, and can you be so hard-hearted as not to contribute to it? But we hope better Things of you, and that God by his Grace will move your Hearts to comply with our Exhortation. To him be Glory for ever Amen.

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